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## Nicky Philipps *Painter*

# 'When I painted the Queen... and William... and Harry...'

Portrait **DAVID SANDISON**

**N**icky Philipps is not happy when she admits me to her small though perfectly-formed studio bang in the heart of Kensington. She has just been sent the Royal Mail image of the stamp with her painting of the Queen, and is disappointed that they cropped her full-length image to a head shot, although she confesses that it was her choice to paint the Queen full length, complete with a complement of dogs — corgis and dorgis around her feet.

Philipps is not new to portraying royalty; her painting of princes Harry and William hangs in the National Portrait Gallery. This commission, she says, was made by the prince's private secretary in consultation with the National Portrait Gallery after her self portrait had appeared in the gallery's portrait award exhibition of 2005.

She moved to this live/work studio in 1993, drawn to it for both its central London location and its north facing windows that "makes shadows more clearly defined, skin more translucent and, in particular, has a very consistent light."

Philipps is the product of a family who painted together. Brought up in Wiltshire, her mother remains a painter of still lifes and flowers and her sister is an accomplished water-colourist.

Her father was also a "good amateur" water-colourist and the family often went on painting holidays "involving a fair amount of painterly competition". Having inherited some money

from her grandfather, Philipps completed her studies at City & Guilds, afterwards decamping to Florence to study painting "right back to the start".

She recalls arriving in the city to see people "holding palettes and mahl sticks" and kindly demonstrates the use of the sticks, something I had assumed were obsolete in the world of fast drying acrylics.

Philipps says simply, "I learned everything in Florence. I did endless life drawing, and once you have that technique whatever you are going to do is going to be better."

The princes came to her studio offering a generous amount of time, but for the Queen she went to Buckingham Palace.

Asking for a north-facing room and a platform to be built, she was given the Chinese drawing room.

As she is an unabashed royalist she chose to portray the Queen in full regalia: "I love the monarchy, it adds colour to the nation". The dogs were a nightmare as they did not want to sit but "just wanted to go out".

When I question whether she likes the Freud portrait of the Queen, she smiles and says politely, "I am sorry to say I don't like it — although I like the amount of paint he uses. The Queen is not green and she hasn't got a moustache."

There is a dignity to the full-length portrait that Philipps has produced, and it shows her enjoyment in her portrayal of the robes, "and her desire to make things sparkle".